11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5



to the fore men whose prestige and influence rest to some extent on new criteria. In this chapter and the one which follows, these two areas of structural change will be examined with respect to their continuity and discontinuity with the Abyssinian past.

In Amhara culture, adolescence scarcely exists as a concept, let alone as a problem. While there are Amharic words which signify "young person," there is no word in Amharic that specifically denotes a *transitional* stage between childhood and adulthood. The goals of a stage of transition to adult status, which to us have become problematic—continuity of the social order and crystallization of personal identity—are customarily attained among the Amhara as a matter of course.

In Ethiopia's modernizing sector, however, society and the individual have been affected by numerous changes all at once. Adult standards have become confused; available roles have multiplied beyond comprehension; new agents and techniques of secondary socialization have supplemented the old. Overnight, adolescence has become both a category and a challenge.

## COMING OF AGE IN ABYSSINIA

In according the individual recognition as an adult, society tends to bring some of its most powerful and explicit integrative forces to bear upon him. In many societies the transition to adulthood is accomplished in part by means of some formal ceremony in which the society corners the young person and puts its stamp upon him. Whether by way of earlobe piercing or ritual whipping, confirmation or graduation, the adolescent generally undergoes some rite which marks his coming of age and obliges him to fulfil himself as an acceptable member of adult society. In some societies, the rites are so devised that they literally represent the "death" of the child and his symbolic resurrection in a new, adult status.[2]

Such transition rites are conspicuously absent from Amhara culture. Quite the contrary: as a young Amhara approaches puberty he is unobtrusively withdrawn from participation in his culture's most solemn ritual, celebration of the Eucharist. Girls of about twelve and boys about fourteen, if they ask for Communion, are simply refused by the priests and told to go away. Thenceforth, until they marry in the church or, if they marry civilly, until their dying hour, they are not permitted to partake of the Holy Sacrament. The only exception to this rule is in the case of some deacons, who earn the right to continued participation in the Mass at the expense of remaining celibate until marriage (a price not always paid in practice).

Another way in which societies tend to mediate the transition to adulthood is through the institution of adolescent peer groups which in various ways help the young person prepare for adult status. Such groups have taken a wide variety of forms. There have been, for example, the several types of age sets in African age-graded societies; mystic orders for youths attached to

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836 183 peers with the insulting term *ʾilb* ("castrated one"). Indeed, the word that comes closest to signifying male adolescent in Amharic, *goramsā*, has the primary connotation of one who goes around with women.

836 572 [837] The conditions attending premarital sexual experience for youths explain in part the nature of adolescent male peer relations. A *goramsā* needs at least one fairly close friend, not only as a confidant for his "secrets," but also to aid him in his affairs. When one *goramsā* goes to the home of a married woman—the strict controls against premarital affairs for girls limit his choice to married women or divorcees—the other stands guard to see that the husband or anyone else does not intrude. When he finds himself in rivalry with a competitor for the same woman, the friend assists him if the fighting gets difficult. On the other hand, the existence of a limited number of accessible females in any area implies that no alliance of friends can become very large; the competition is too great. The conflicts of interest among *goramsā* often provoke feuding and sometimes serious *dulā* fights.

836 [585] The unwed girl, by contrast, must remain a virgin at all costs. It is important to the groom, not only because of the religious and social sentiments involved, but also because the Amhara male cherishes the sense of "conquering" his woman. A girl who is found not to be a virgin on her wedding night will be beaten by her husband and possibly returned to her parents. Her parents will be scandalized, and, if she is sent back, will probably give her a beating.

882 In order to protect the girl's virginity, she is kept under close watch by her parents after the age of ten or eleven. They do not allow her to go outside the home area by herself or to associate with boys who are not her relatives. She attends festive celebrations in the company of her parents. In some families she is kept from doing excessively heavy work in order to prevent the accidental rupture of her hymen.

881 582 The onset of menstruation is kept secret, since menstruation is seen as a shameful event for the unmarried woman. But as the girl approaches the age of puberty her mother will be advised by other female relatives that it is time to be on the lookout for a husband. Twelve or thirteen is the customary marrying age for girls, as compared with the late teens or early twenties for boys; and it has not been uncommon for girls to marry still younger, especially in former times.

*883 [832] [584] This strict surveillance of the daughter does not wholly prevent a mild sort of flirting which occurs at the marketplace or on public holidays. On the latter occasions, especially Masqāl and Ṭimqat, the girl may make some effort to appear attractive. She may wear her best clothes, dress up her hair, and, if she can afford it, put on a bit of perfume. These occasions provide a chance for the unmarried boy to spot an interesting mate, in which case he